

Bonn Defense Aide Suspended After Spy Disclosures

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WEST BERLIN, Dec. 13.—West Germany's Defense Minister, facing a storm of criticism over the disclosure of a major spy ring in his ministry, announced the suspension today of an official from whose safe both West German and NATO military secrets had been passed to East Germans.

But the minister, Georg Leber, defended his department at a news conference in Bonn and said he saw no reason to resign over its handling of the scandal, involving three former civilian employees who were arrested in June 1976.

Mr. Leber said that he himself had not known the full details of the case until he read an account of it in the press yesterday. He had been content, he said, to leave the affair in "the good hands" of the police and of counterespionage agents.

For the nearly 18 months since the arrest of the three former Defense Ministry employees, the public had known only that they had been taken into custody during a crackdown on spies in West Germany.

Access to Secret Plans

Yesterday, for the first time, it became known that they had had access to such secrets as plans of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for dealing with East-West military crises, assessments of the East bloc's defense system and strategic plans for the West German Army.

The disclosure, later confirmed by a Defense Ministry spokesman, was made in the newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, which quoted a secret report put together by Mr. Leber's ministry for the state attorney who is to prosecute the former employees at a trial next year.

The Defense Minister announced today that he was trying to find out who in his ministry had given the secret report to the Frankfurt newspaper.

"For the journalists it was a matter of honor to publish the report," he declared, "but the official who handed over the secret material committed treason."

NATO 'Thoroughly Informed'

Mr. Leber emphasized that he had kept allied officials and NATO "thoroughly informed" on the case. He said NATO headquarters in Brussels "immediately took necessary steps" when the spy ring was arrested last year.

Some allied officials charged, however, that the full scope of the case had only now been revealed.

"We had no information about the extent of the military spying," one American diplomat said.

West German newspapers today described the scandal, in which thousands of secret files had been passed to East Germany, as the most serious German espionage case since World War II, and the conservative Christian Democratic opposition called a debate in Parliament tomorrow to demand of the Government of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt that a shakeup be undertaken at high levels.

Official Is Suspended

Defense Minister Leber said that, pending a disciplinary investigation, he had ordered the suspension of Herbert Laabs, the head of the ministry's social affairs department, whose secretary was one of the three persons arrested in 1976 on espionage charges.

Mr. Leber said that the secretary, 37-year-old Renate Lutze, had been hired and given clearance to handle top-secret documents in April 1967, when Kurt Georg Kissinger, a Christian Democrat, was chancellor.

He said it was the Christian Democrats who had "appointed a spy," adding that he must assume that other spies were still operating in the West German armed forces.

The Defense Ministry report said that Mrs. Lutze had had a key to the safe in her superior's office and thus had access to the secret documents kept there. In addition, she was said to have had other secret documents delivered to her office in her superior's name, although he had not asked for them.

According to the report, Mrs. Lutze had had a special photocopy machine installed in her office, where she was said to have frequently worked overtime.

Arrested along with her were her husband, Lothar Erwin Lutze, who worked in the ministry's arms branch, and Jürgen

Wiegel, a civilian employee of the navy. Mr. Lutze is accused of having been a long time agent and of having had his wife collect and copy secret papers.

Mr. Leber did not explain the apparent contradiction of why he had not heard about all the details when he said the NATO allies were thoroughly informed.

But a Defense Ministry official explained that the truth about the spy ring

had been discovered gradually as more and more documents were listed as having been available for transmission to East Germany. He said that the allies and NATO had been kept informed "on a step-by-step basis," but that the latest information had not yet been conveyed to the Defense Minister.

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